

A Gynocritical study of *The Company of Wolves* by Angela Carter

Azadeh Nouri^{1*}, Fatemeh Aziz Mohammadi²

¹Department of English Language, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

²Department of English Literature, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

*E-mail address: Azadeh.nouri89@gmail.com, f-azizmohammadi@iau-arak.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

In 1979, Carter published one of her most renowned collections of short fiction, *The Bloody Chamber*. The majority of Angela Carter's work revolves around a specific type of feminism, radical libertarian feminism and her critique of the patriarchal role that have been placed on women, which she promotes feminist due to her style, referred to as "Galm-Rock" feminism. In this article, the main concentrate is on heroine's internalized consciousness which echoes in their behavior. All of the female protagonists in Carter's short stories; such as *The Werewolf*, *The Wolf_Alice*, and mainly in *The Company of Wolves* have similar characteristics with different conditions, in which they are represented in a very negative light with less than ideal roles. In these stories, the protagonist is a young girl who has many conflicts with love and desire. Carter attempts to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation.

Keywords: Gynocriticism; Galm Rock feminism; love; suffragette; levitation-abstraction; pornography; patriarchal; desire

1. INTRODUCTION

Elaine Showalter born 1941 taught English and women's studies for many years at Rutgers University. Her book; *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing*.

Gynocriticism is the study of women writers historically as a distinct literary tradition. Showalter coined this term in her essay "toward a feminist poetics". It refers to a criticism that constructs "a female frame work for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience rather than to adapt male models and theories. (Quoted by Gordon and Kreiswirth from "toward a feminist poetics, new feminist criticism 131")

Gynocritical study is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology and the history and development of the female literary tradition. Gynocriticism developed as a literary critique from the theories and techniques of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis; post-structuralism is by nature, the study of the uncertain. They identifying the fact that language is ambiguous and therefore the universe is indeterminate. Psychoanalytic criticism

focused on the word of Freud and the concept of the unconscious. The textual content is both conscious and uncovering or decoding of the two.

2. ANGELA CARTER

Angela carter was an English fiction writer and journalist. She was ranked number ten in The Times list of “The 50 greatest British writers since 1945”. Carter was a fiction writer and journalist whose writings embody a commitment to feminism and magical realism. She studied English literature at the University of Bristol. She moved to Tokyo for 2 years and her experience in Japan was immortalized in 1974 in fireworks.

Carter wrote many novels, works of nonfiction, anthologies as well as several articles. One of her anthologies is *The Bloody Chamber*; contains 10 short stories. In this anthology Carter rewrites fairy tales. A fairy tale is a type of short story that typically featured folkloric fantasy characters, such as fairies, elves, giants or mermaids and usually involve magic or enchantments. In some cultures where demons and witches are perceived as real, fairy tales merge into legends. The Brothers Grimm was among the first fairy tale writers that preserve the feature of oral tales.

The fairy tale

“You mention folk culture and people immediately assume you’re going to talk about porridge and clog dancing.....”

Angela Carter, 1991

Carter in 1979 began for the first time to be read widely by readers who identified with her as a reader and rewriter. It seems that Carter; in the *Bloody Chamber* explains herself, unpacked her gifts, played her own fairy godmother.

The present essay sets out to explore some of the implications of this story, and the role fairy tales played in it. Fairy tales have a relation to reader’s heart; it explores the mysteries of love.

Carter in the preface to the first of the two collections of fairy tales, she wrote that fairy tales and folktales represent “the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world.” Like pornography, the fairy tale was practical fantasy, and it worked by narrative levitation abstraction, patterning, getting above yourself.

Those women, whom Carter has in her fictions, can be finding in conduct books, novels, psychoanalysis and suburbia as well as in pornography. And the fairy tale too has come to serve this post romantic agony culture that is modern and masochistic at once. Carter had always played with other “genres” like the gothic science fiction.

Women writers are hugely inventive in these genres, but some of them don’t afford the formal distance of the fairy tale, which has longer and larger history. So fairy tale has here a two faced character. Male and female character appears at the same time.

One of the reason she so valued fairy tale and one that is obscured by a too exclusive focus on gender politics is that she associated it with a world where our dreads and desires were personified in beings that were not human without being divine.

3. SHOWALTER AND GYNOCRITICISM

According to Elaine Showalter; gynocriticism is the study of not only the female as a gender status but also the “internalized consciousness” of the female. The uncovering of the female subculture and exposition of a female model is the intention of gynocriticism. Showalter believes that; literary history has been three distinct phases of gynocriticism. Until the 20th century:

1. The female literature tradition was constructed of images and values of the idealized feminine; which constructed from the patriarchal oppression that sought to identify the woman as “other”.

2. During the 20th century, the feminist movement saw a reaction to the patriarchal of previous times and protested the ideology of the feminine.

3. The most recent development is the “female” criticism, where a female identity is sought free from the masculine definitions and oppositions.

The recognition of a distinct female canon and the development of the “female reader” are fundamental aspect of gynocriticism.

4. CARTER AND GALM ROCK FEMINISM

Feminism is a concept that is not easily defined. Feminism is a complex ideology that encompasses many different subcategories that are all uniquely different from one another. One of the most radical and stylish fiction authors of the 20th century, Angela Carter, expresses her views of feminism through her various novels, fairy tales, and re-writes of fairy tales. Carter believes that women are represented in a very negative light with less than ideal roles that neither please nor glorify them.

Through Carter’s fairy tales, Carter is looking to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation by rising up and fighting against the oppression and fighting for equality. The majority of Angela Carter’s works revolve around a specific type of feminism, radical-libertarian feminism and her critique of the patriarchal roles that have been placed on women throughout time. Her female protagonist often takes on empowered roles where they rise up against oppression and fight for both sexual and political equality.

Although Carter is British, her pieces heavily depict what women from the U.S feminist movement were fighting for. The bloody chamber heavily reflects concepts from within this movement relating specifically to the ideologies of radical-libertarian feminists. Carter began experimenting with writing fairy tales in 1970, which coincided with the period of second-wave feminism in the United States. In 1970’s was the era of the women’s liberations when second-wave feminists fought for rights and opportunities that were equal to men as well as freedom of choice.

These feminists promoted the ideal that women need to become “androgynous persons” or women who possess both good masculine traits and good feminine traits. They argue that patriarchal society was rigid gender roles to keep women passive and men active. They believed that women needed to mix and match masculine and feminine traits. They claimed that as feminists, they needed to promote the idea that women need to reclaim control over female sexuality by demanding the right to practice whatever gives them pleasure and satisfaction. Female sexual liberation was among radical-liberation’s biggest messages. Radical-libertarian feminists wanted there to no longer be restrains on women’s right to choose. Angela Carter revolved her tales around these radical-libertarian goals.

5. SUMMARY

The narrator describes a wintry Northern country and the natural of the wolves there, who have terrifying eyes ghostly howls and a love of flash. Anyone who goes into the forest is in danger of the starving wolves, so the people of the wolves are werewolves (a person in stories who sometimes changes into a wolf, though and sneak into human homes). The narrator describes a tale of a man who caught a wolf in a pit and cut its throat, but when it died the wolf transformed into a man. Another tale was about a jealous witch who turned a wedding party into wolves or a young women that her bridegroom disappears mysteriously on their wedding night. She waits for him but then hears the howling of wolves outside. Soon the young women gives up finding her husband and she marries another man. They have children and live together, but one day her first husband returns with dirty appearance. When he sees the second husband he gets angry and transforms back into a wolf, they killed him with a hatchet.

The narrator mentions a few more superstitions about wolves, then begin the story of a child who decides to travel thought the woods and bring oatcakes to her grandmother. The child bring a long knife in her basket. She is just on the threshold of woman hood and has begun to menstruate for the first time. She feels protected by the “invisible pentacle for her own virginity”, and she enters the forest unafraid.

The child hears wolves howling, and then a handsome young hunt same appears, he talks with her and they stand walking together. She gives him her basket to carry, even though her knife is in it, as the huntsman has a rifle. He show the child a compass, which she has never seen before and he tells her he know a shortcut too grandmother's house if she will leave the path. The child challenges him, and the huntsman bets that he can reach her grandmother's house before she does. If he does, the child has to kiss him. The huntsman goes off and takes the child's basket with him. The child tries to walk slowly, even though it has started snowing, as she wants the huntsman to win the contact and kiss her. Meaning while the huntsman reached grandmother's house. She is in bed with her Bible when he knocks and she invite him in. The huntsman comes in and transforms into a wolf and eat the grandmother clothes get in the bed.

The child arrives and the wolf invited into the room. At first she is disappointed that the huntsman didn't get their first, but the she notices the hair in the fire place and “what big eyes” her grandmother has. Then a company of wolves start howling just outside the house, the wolf calls them his “brothers” and the child looks out the window of them. The child realizes that the fear is not helpful so she takes off her red shawl with the rest of her clothes. She throw them into the fire. She stands there asked for a moment and they goes to the wolf. He is drooling with hunger but she embrace him and kisses him, laughing, as if “she know she was nobody's meat”. She takes off the wolf's clothing and seduce him. Afterward the child and the wolf lie peacefully together in the grandmother's bed.

6. ANALYSIS

This is another interpretation of “Little Red Riding Hood”. Carter thinks deeply more on the nature of “beast lines” in the wolves of the north. In the tale also there werewolf that can transforms to human or vice versa, it can be asserts that there can also be a wolf within a human. Instead of talking wolf of the original tale, Carter is more interested in werewolves as another example of metamorphic creatures torn both internally and externally between beast

lines and humanity. In one of the tales which is at the beginning of this short story, the transformation from man to wolf is associated with the wedding night. It is another connection between the loss of virginity and metamorphosis. The red cloak of Little Red Riding Hood is explicitly connected to the blood of menstrual cycle and the loss of virginity. The main focus is on heroine who like "The Tigers Bride" is not afraid of beast. The grandmother's bedroom is the bloody chamber of this story. Red riding Hoods traditional phrases: "what big eyes you have" mentioned at the final part of story, the wolf is a beast because of his hunger, but the child has her own wildness, too. The motifs of The Bloody Chamber are nakedness, the blood of menstruation and lost virginity, and transformation return, as the child turns into her own kind of "wolf" by becoming a sexual being and robbing the wolf of his power, essentially "taming" him.

Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves" is a feminist and gothic retelling of the classic fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood". Carter's story involves the Werewolf as sexual hunter. It's a symbol for both danger and desire, in which a young girl wins, using her new found sexual power and giving in to the symbol of carnal desire. Carter changes the age of girl in this story, she is not a child anymore, and she grows up and is becoming an adult. It seems that the forest and wolves are symbol of real society in which every young girl live there. Wolves resemble adult men whom are greedy to achieve young girls. This tale signs praises to female sexuality and liberation, and implies that nothing else, not God nor fear nor good living will save the victims of the wolf, and the only way to survive in a world in which temptation. Danger and desire talks you everywhere, is to fight fire with fire. The story appears in two parts, one of which tells folk tales of the wolf and were wolf, the other of which tells of Little Red Riding Hood. This part mentions some tales with terrifying descriptions of the wolf and his deeds.

The fear of the wolf is bred into the children and the women, almost like paranoia. In the first part of Carter's story, the narrator tells of a woman who was bitten in her own kitchen while straining the macaroni. This part shows Showalter's ideology that asserts in her essay, "In the wilderness":

In defining female culture, historians distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviors prescribed and considered appropriate for woman and those activities, behaviors, and functions actually generated out of women's lives. In the late- eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "woman sphere" expressed the Victorian and Jack Sonian vision of separated roles for men and women, with little or no overlap and with women subordinate. Women's sphere was defined and maintained by men, but women frequently internalized its precepts in the American, "cult of true woman hood" and the English, "feminine ideal". Women's culture, however, redefines women's activities and goals from a woman-centered point of The term implies an assertion of equality and an awareness of sister hood. The community of women.

Carter tries to show that, every women or female characters shouldn't have fear towards their difficulties in society.

Encountering with wolf and it is fear is a symbol of society's difficulties and fear. If the girl shows fear, she will not win. It is exactly like all women, without fear, they can win. Carter uses women's sexual desire to deceive the wolf. And it can prove that female writing refer to language of their body or write about body more. Carter uses fairy tales to show her

idea and thought about women, because most of fairy tales resemble women's weakness. So Carter changes this idea in her reader's mind.

One of the best sentences in this story is: "The forest closed upon her like a pair of jaws." Her clever imagination explicitly builds the horrors that wait for the girl. This girl is the only girl who can control her fear enough to get the better of one of the monsters, which leads me to the surprise ending of the story. It is definitely a clever ending; it is not often we read about Red Riding Hood.

Carter is a feminist writer, and her folktale retellings certainly have a pro-woman leaning to them, to introduce new ways for encountering difficulties.

7. CONCLUSION

The fairy tale genre is thus harnessed by Carter for the purposes of consciousness raising, adapting a familiar tale for her own purposes, as well as implicitly commenting on the traditions and uses of such tales. Her female first-person narrator communicates her experiences and the social and material conditions of her life through the flexible structure of the fairy tale.

Red Riding Hood sheds the historical associations of her own red cloak which resembles; blood, sexual availability and a various set of meanings. These revisions may empower the heroine, enhance her animal instincts, or give her a richer identity. Some challenge the power of the wolf as a symbol of patriarchy. Others merely challenge his status as the tyrant of the fairy tale. Some suggest Red Riding Hood's darker side; others highlight her natural sexuality or her predatory mating tactics. Some of these revisions just give the heroine a change of clothes.

Storytellers from the women's movement and beyond reclaimed the heroine and her grandfather from male dominated literary tradition, recasting the women as brave and resourceful, turning Red Riding Hood into the physical or sexual aggressor and questioning the masculine pride of the wolf. The present essay sets out to explore some of the implications of this story, and the role fairy tales played in it. Fairy tales have a relation to reader's heart; it explores the mysteries of love. Through Carter's fairy tales, Carter is looking to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation by rising up and fighting against the oppression and fighting for equality. Carter effectively draws out the theme of feminism which usually depicted female characters as weak and helpless, but with strong female protagonists. Carter is able to create sexually liberated female characters that are set against the more traditional backdrop of the fairy tale. Carter reinvents the outdated fairy tales and offers insight on the archetypes and stereotypes of women in these well-known stories.

References

- [1] Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber*. London: Penguin Group, 1993.
- [2] Lodge, David. *Modern criticism and Theory*. New York: Longman, 2000.
- [3] Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of literary terms*. Canada: Wadsworth, 2005.
- [4] Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York, 2010.

- [5] Showalter, Elaine. *New feminist criticism: Essay on women, literature, Theory*: Canada, Pantheon, 1985.
- [6] Carter, Angela. *Angela Carter's Book of fairy tales*: London, Virago Press Ltd, 2005.
- [7] Orenstein, Cathrine. *Little red riding hood uncloaked, sex, morality and evolution of a fairy tale*: United States, Basic Books, 2002.
- [8] Schmitz, Thomas. *Modern literary theory and ancient texts*: USA, Blackwell, 2007.
- [9] Wolfreys, Julian. Robbins, Ruth and Womack Kenneth. *key concepts in literary theory*: UK, Edinburgh university press, 2002.
- [10] Payne, Micheal. Barbera, Jessica Rae. *dictionary of cultural and critical theory*: USA, Blackwell, 2010.

(Received 25 January 2015; accepted 06 February 2015)